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FM AIT TAIPEI
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage June 26 on the 2008 presidential election; on the arrest of a second suspect allegedly involving in a murder case in May; and on the aftermath of a tour bus crash Sunday. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" commented on the Chen Shui-bian administration's push for a referendum on the island's bid to join the United Nations under the name "Taiwan." The article urged Washington to "cherish Taiwan's democracy by showing more support for Taiwan in the international arena." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" also chimed in by calling on the United States and the international community to respond positively to the calls by the Taiwan people to join the world community. End summary.

A) "Fighting China's Diplomatic Warfare"

Liu Kuan-teh, a Taipei-based political commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (6/26):

"While the administration of US President George W. Bush has officially objected to the administration of President Chen Shui-bian using the name 'Taiwan' to apply for UN membership this year, calling it a move to unilaterally change the cross-strait 'status quo,' Washington seems to be overlooking measures by Beijing to wage diplomatic warfare against Taiwan's participation in the international arena. ...

"... In addition to his predecessor Peter Rodman's accusation that China violated the 'status quo' last year, [US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard] Lawless is the first US official to

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confirm Beijing's military expansion has 'changed' the cross-strait 'status quo.' Not only have those two statements illustrated the complicated nature of US-Taiwan relations, they have also demonstrated an essential need for leaders of both Washington and Taipei to engage in a more candid, cooperative and constructive dialogue in the next nine months prior to Taiwan's presidential election.

"Some analysts have emphasized that since the Bush administration is preoccupied with North Korea and Iraq, Taiwan should remain quiet and refrain from giving Beijing reasons to pressure the US over Taiwan policy. But even if Taiwan plays the good kid, to what extent has Washington successfully urged Beijing to give more space to Taipei on the playground? Bush's recent speech in Prague earlier this month serves as an example for Taipei and Washington to rethink their bilateral relationship. ...

"If Bush and his administration are serious about this, they should cherish Taiwan's democracy by showing more support for Taiwan in the

international arena. The Taiwanese government's attempts to safeguard its sovereignty in the face of China's constant attempts at international isolation and military intimidation should be viewed as a model democracy counteracting authoritarian suppression.

Who more than Taiwan deserves the promise behind Bush's strategy of 'seeking and supporting the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation?' The US-Taiwan relationship could benefit from following such a strategy."

B) "U.N. Referendum Aims to Defend Taiwan's Status"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (6/26):

"We approve of the decision by the governing Democratic Progressive Party to persist with its petition campaign for a national referendum on whether Taiwan should apply to join the United Nations despite the open demand issued last Tuesday by the U.S. State Department for President Chen Shui-bian 'to exercise leadership by rejecting such a proposed referendum.' As noted last week, Washington's protest was an improper action for a country that touts its commitment to democratic principles, especially since the U.S. State Department was obviously mistaken about the nature of the referendum drive. ...

"Indeed, Washington policy makers may not appreciate that the referendum calling on the government to apply as 'Taiwan' for U.N. entry is itself a relatively moderate option in that it does not involve any declaration of a change in Taiwan's status or official moniker, but only urges the U.N. membership to grant the people of Taiwan their just representation in the U.N. in order to prevent the erosion of Taiwan's actual autonomy and democracy, the protection of which is of priceless value to the world community. ... Given Beijing's opposition, such entry is obviously not likely to be realized on the short term but a direct application buttressed with a demonstration of overwhelming popular support in Taiwan would put the issue on the international agenda and serve as a 'reality check'

for world powers (apparently including the United States) which persist in turning a blind eye to the real state of affairs in the Taiwan Strait.

"Moreover, if global powers including the U.S. refuse to take action to curb the PRC's drive to 'legalize' its claim over Taiwan in the international community, calls in Taiwan for a national referendum on more fundamental questions will undoubtedly intensify. ... Instead of blaming the victim of the PRC's expansionist ambition, the U.S. and the rest of the international community should respond to the calls by Taiwan's people and thus preserve both democracy and peace in the Taiwan Strait."

YOUNG